



Hostages of Promise

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By: Melinda Camber Porter

Cyril Connolly, educated at Eton and Christ Church, originator of *Horizon*, *Legion 'Honneur*, author and critic, now writes regularly for *The Sunday Times*... 'Cyril was the cleverest of us all, the tragedy was, he was too critical... and he could have written more.' (W.H.Auden).

Cyril Connolly makes no concessions to public opinion. In as much, he is a figure of the past. Today, Norman Mailer bestrides the literary world like a colossus with his publicity machine and mammoth novels, when the image projected becomes the reality. Cyril Connolly's quiet voice, modulated to talk to one person, and his slim volume, *The Unquiet Grave*, with its delicately woven structure based on the sonata, are all sadly out of place.

"I didn't really want to do the interview. I never give lectures because I can't bear public appearances. But an interview isn't so bad because I am only talking to one person."

But although he disregards and despises some of the realities of life – self-publicity, exhibitionism, his work is deeply concerned with the realities of failure, mourning and human inadequacy.

"One has to go through certain periods of suffering – like mourning over loss. But the neurotic who punishes himself through guilt, endures fruitless and unending pain."

The Unquiet Grave is conceived around the Palinurus Myth and theme of mourning. His lengthy psychoanalysis guided him through his inner world and increased his sense of self-awareness.

"I don't like people. That's why I could never be a novelist. I need to see people at one remove – in a mirror. For instance, some people like living with dogs; I'm only capable of taking them for walks!"

He's more in the French than the English tradition, a lover of Chamfort, Baudelaire, Provence, Wine and Abstraction.

"I was always wanting to rush off to the South of France to get away from the greyness of England."

Oxford was grey. Tort bored him, and so he didn't work. "But you read a lot when you were there," I asked him. Most of what I learnt was from Maurice (Bowra) and other classical scholars. But I was



gregarious, and one of the young men who entertained and spent their money well. I missed my opportunity to do anything there.”

His initial comment, “I hope you’re not going to ask me about my school days with George Orwell.” Prevented me from asking him about his illustrious friends – the whole literary generation of the war. He was in any case a leading light, starting up the literary magazine *Horizon*, one of the few journals of literary criticism during the war years.

I wondered what he thought about today - London, Oxford, Poetry, and Novelists. “I am not hopeless.

I don't think things have reached a desperate pitch... I don't see much of students; you're the first I've seen for a while... As for writers today I don't think there's anyone of outstanding genius. But I may be looking in the wrong places. And it's difficult for me to judge nowadays.”

Cyril Connolly lived through the last fifty years with the awareness of an artist. He participated intensely in the literary and psychoanalytical life and the horrors of war, and now he has time to review it in peace.

He lives in Eastbourne with his wife and two children. He comes up to London once a week to do his column for *The Sunday Times*.

“I never thought I'd end my days in a house of clocks and children,” he said wistfully. “My whole way of life has changed.”

Mr. Connolly is one of the few people who has chosen to reconcile himself to domestic bliss, at just the right time of life.

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